

April 25, 2019

Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor
City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

We are the backbone of your efforts to expand early childhood education programs, particularly your signature initiatives *Pre-K for All* and *3-K expansion*. We support the creation of an integrated birth to five early education system; however, we are profoundly concerned that the new RFPs underwriting the creation of this system will harm providers, teachers, and children and families in communities we serve.

We are outraged that the RFPs advanced by the Department of Education (DOE) starve the early education system of sorely needed investments even as teachers threaten to strike and providers consider closing classrooms or entire programs to remain financially viable.

We call on your administration to withdraw the DOE's Birth-to-Five RFP and the Head Start/Early Head Start RFP and to work with us to develop a comprehensive plan that allows children, families, neighborhoods, and community-based providers to succeed.

Not only is greater transparency needed on the total amount of resources the administration aims to commit to the creation of the Birth-to-Five early education system, but goals must be established on the number of children the system hopes to reach by age cohort and program type. Most importantly, the administration must guarantee that contracts are funded at a level that not only supports salary parity with teachers, staff and directors in public schools, but fully covers the costs associated with running a high-quality early education program.

The current RFPs are unworkable and unacceptable, because they:

- **Perpetuate salary disparities:** If these RFPs move forward, teachers, staff, and directors in community-based organizations will continue to earn significantly less than their counterparts in public schools. Currently, the gap in compensation between CBO early educators and DOE early educators ranges from \$15,000 to \$35,000.
- **Penalize providers with Pay for Enrollment:** The Pay for Enrollment plan in the RFPs allows DOE to pay providers less than what is needed to cover all costs by penalizing providers if enrollment dips. As DOE will handle all enrollment centrally, providers will be limited in their ability to bring new children into programs even if there is tremendous need.
- **Fail to efficiently structure programs:** The Birth-to-Five RFP reduces services for families by creating a new distinction between "core" and "non-core" hours which shows a lack of understanding about what children and their families need. Programs that offer extended day, holiday and summer hours, along with family support are a crucial part of early education for the poorest children and families in this city. Anything that jeopardizes these program components will have a negative impact on children's school readiness and parental employment stability.

- **Provide no funding for indirect costs:** Funding for indirect expenses such as program management and oversight, administrative operations, facilities, and organizational insurance policies are critical to keep programs running. These costs are not covered in the RFPs.
- **Lack cost escalators:** Program costs will naturally grow over time and yet, the RFPs fail to build in cost escalators and therefore set providers up for major gaps in funding.

Despite many conversations with providers, advocates, and other stakeholders, your administration refuses to address these problems. It is one thing to state your support publicly for the benefits of Universal Pre-K, campaign on the expansion of 3- K and laud the progress to be achieved in creating a unified birth to five early childhood education system in New York City, it is quite another to commit the resources necessary to make such progress a reality.

We urge you to withdraw the Birth-to-Five RFP and the Head Start/Early Head Start RFP and restart this process, this time with the resources needed to ensure salary parity and fully cover the costs associated with running a high-quality early education program.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We will continue to speak out and publicly share our concerns with New Yorkers. We stand ready to help you achieve a strong, stable, high quality Birth- to-Five early education system to support New York City's children and families.

Sincerely,

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c:

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